

Why Do Nice Guys Finish Last?

An Honors Thesis Creative Project (HONRS 499)

by

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A documentary film on the subject of gender role studies sounds pretty dry. This short film is intended to be shown to college students in a classroom setting as a way of engaging their interest on the topic much more effectively than a lecture would be likely to do. Therefore the film will use a comedic approach and down-to-earth tone to explore the issues, and must clearly illustrate how this topic relates directly to students' everyday lives.

Acknowledgements:

Crew:

- Joshua Swihart, Producer, Editor, First Assistant Director
- Clifton Radford, Director of Photography
- James Handy, Assistant to the Director
- DJ Barrett, Second Assistant Director
- Carly Rhoades, Script Supervisor
- Paul Symons, Camera Operator
- Nolan Miller, Camera Operator, Boom Operator
- Noah Kintzel, Grip
- Max De Janon, Grip
- Tyler Pittman, Audio Engineer
- Brian Moore, Editor

Subject Matter Experts:

- Jerry Novack, Doctoral Student, Department of Counseling Psychology and Guidance Services
- Carmen Siering, Assistant Professor of English, Assistant Professor of Women and Gender Studies
- Heather Adams, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Psychology
- Chris Flook, Instructor of Telecommunications

Roundtable Participants:

- Sarah Ryan
- Laura Pittenger
- Rebecca White
- Carly Rhoades

Vox Pops Participants:

- Tiffany Hendricks
- Lauren Anderson
- Caleb Calloway
- David McCarel
- Eduardo Linares
- Kerry D. Ort
- Dena Dobrzyvowski
- Joanne Tudorica
- Gregor Keuthage
- Abigail Drumm
- Cassandra Rider
- Kayla Knotts
- Joshua Swihart

Locations:

- Charlie Scofield, Student Center Tally

Thesis Advisor:

- Elizabeth G. Pike, Instructor of Telecommunications

Sheila Plank
HONRS 499
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Author's Statement

Why Do Nice Guys Finish Last?

This project has evolved over the duration of my college career. The original idea came to me while sitting in Women's Studies 210 during the fall of 2007. We had just watched a documentary called *Tough Guise* (1999, Jhally) and were having a discussion about the film. I had been reflecting on my own personal history of romantic relationships. In fact, for several years I had refused to date anyone, because I had become aware that I was never attracted to the right kind of guy - the kind of guy I would want to end up with. Instead, I always found myself attracted to "bad boys," musicians, guys I thought were passionate. But I had recently discovered that I was mistaking poor impulse control for passion, and as a result, had gotten into relationships with men who couldn't possibly meet my needs.

In the class, we talked about media images of masculinity and how that shaped our expectations of manliness. I realized I should be looking for and dating the kind of man that would make me happy in the long run, instead of just the guy I found magnetic or irresistible. I was having an epiphany, and I wanted to share my newly found insights with other women - especially younger women, and I thought a documentary film would be a great way to do it. But the film could not be preachy or offer definitive answers, lest it be too easily dismissed. Instead, it should offer a suggestion, the hint of an idea and nothing more. Viewers would then be able to draw their own conclusions. My approach in creating this documentary film has therefore been to present a conversation starter, a jumping-off point from which classroom discussion can then branch out.

This idea crystallized when I described to a psychology professor friend of mine (Dr. Heather Adams, who appears in the film) what I had planned to do. She expressed great excitement at the prospect of showing a short documentary film to her class and having the opportunity to discuss it the same day. She explained the difficulties of generating any real discussion following the presentation of a 60 – 90 minute film; it takes a whole class period, she said, sometimes two – just to show the film, then the students go away for two days and by the time they come back, they can't remember enough of what they've seen to discuss it in any real depth. After that conversation I understood that a short documentary would find an audience within classrooms here on campus, and I set about my work in preproduction.

After analyzing genres popular with college students, it became obvious that a good balance between humor and honesty would be my best approach for engaging the audience and sparking their interest in discussing the topic further. Keeping things casual also seemed to be key. The idea of doing *Vox Pop* ("voice of the people") interviews emerged as an obvious solution to help me connect with the demographic. Additionally, I understood that I would have to show more recent films in the video montage than the ones I had originally planned. The movies in my original list included action films that are considered classics, but might not seem relevant to today's youth, because the movies were popular long before the students were born in many cases. So I included clips from *Inglorious Basterds* instead of *Dirty Harry*, *300* instead of *Rambo*. I did keep a few clips from classic titles such as *Scarface* and *Die Hard*, however, because those films, actors, and scenes in particular have become iconic of the hypermasculine archetype under discussion.

My work in pre-production was nudged along when, in the Spring of 2008, as part of the coursework for my History of Documentary Film class, I described in detail how I would go about producing this documentary (see attached paper: Why Nice Guys Finish Last). I knew I wanted to interview Carmen Siering because I had taken her WMNST 210 class and trusted that she was capable of describing male gender roles, and would be accessible to the audience because of her down-to-earth tone. I chose Dr. Heather Adams because of her academic focus on romantic scripts and how fairy tales learned early in life affect the psychology of developing girls and boys. For the final paper in the History of Documentary Film class, we were required to discuss not only what subjects we would interview but also what kind of budget, crew, equipment, and time would be necessary to complete the project. Although I greatly underestimated the crew that would be needed, the paper forced me to think about certain decisions far in advance, and made me realize I could actually produce this film on Ball State's campus, using local subject matter experts and crew, and with little or no budget. From that point, I started considering the project a good candidate for my Honors Thesis.

Preproduction during the semester in which I actually signed up for HONRS 499 included scouting and booking locations, recruiting a crew, gaining special permission to use the HD cameras, scheduling time to interview experts, and developing appropriate questions. I already knew I wanted to interview Dr. Adams and Carmen Siering, but my faculty mentor suggested I also interview Chris Flook, and Dr. Adams recommended I talk to Jerry Novack. It made sense to include these two as subject matter experts, since both have done recent work on the topic of masculinity. As an added bonus, their

participation in the project created a gender balance among subject matter experts; the audience would now be offered perspectives from both men and women.

The roundtable discussion was originally planned to include ten to twelve heterosexual female students who had recently taken the Psychology of Women class. At the end of last semester, I recruited twelve such women to participate; at the last minute, however, half of them cancelled and the other half wouldn't respond to my e-mails. The studio and crew were booked, the equipment was scheduled for the shoot, the expert interviews were lined up, even the food and tapes that would be needed for the shoot had been purchased; in short, everything was in place except the girls. As they say in the business, the show must go on. This meant recruiting from my not inconsiderable list of Facebook friends, several of whom came through for me at the last moment. The discussion group was smaller than originally planned, but it worked just as well.

In post-production, I mainly relied on my earlier plans and outlines to guide my choices of inclusion and exclusion, and how to fit all of the content together. I had over 15 hours of video to choose from, so I had to take the best gems from each interview and string them together with a relevant narrative. One editor put together the video montage, which was too long and had to be trimmed considerably, and another put together the first assembly of the Vox Pop interviews. We wound up using only a tiny portion of the expert interviews we shot. In fact, there is enough footage to do a much longer version of the film – if only I had the budget!

Throughout my work on this film I have made an important discovery. Consistently I heard that girls at the high school and college levels are typically more interested in adventure than long-term relationships, and they tend to go for the tough guy

image. However, when they are ready to settle down, most women do gravitate toward the nice guy archetype because he is more likely to be able to meet her long-term needs. And while the nice guys themselves – at least in high school and college – may feel they are coming in last, when the time is right these men are generally considered the more attractive mate. I've highlighted this in the documentary in a way that might give hope to the young man in class who doesn't fit the masculine stereotype, and might cause young women to think twice about their dating choices.

Appendix A – Why Nice Guys Finish Last

TCOM 299X Final Paper – The History of Documentary Film

Why Nice Guys Finish Last

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Part One

The film will open with a series of shots in which young men face the camera and ask the question, "Why do nice guys finish last?" The shots will be intercut so that one man finishes the last man's sentence, and the words "nice guys" will be repeated several times. At least one of the men will add the phrase "nice guys like me" to the line, and the words "like me" may also be repeated to set a lighter, more personal tone. These shots will be done in a vox pop style to appear as "man on the street" interviews, but will in fact be scripted. Other portions of these interviews will be used later in the film.

The opening sequence will then transition into a video montage of action heroes, starting with Rambo shooting his assault rifle and flexing his rippling muscles. This juxtaposition of ordinary college-age males against the hypermasculine image is intended to create a comedic effect while simultaneously introducing the gender role theory. To increase the humor, a shot of real-life young men play-fighting with fake weapons will be shown immediately

before the Rambo image. Then the Rambo clip will be shown in slow motion and music will be synchronized to heighten both contrast and comedy.

Other action hero clips will be added, creating a montage sequence: Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry, Bruce Willis as John McClane, Al Pacino as Scarface, Marlon Brando as Don Corleone, and Arnold Schwarzenegger as the Terminator. The clips will center on the tough guy image and either the use of violence or threat of violence to advance the character's desires. They will include brief snippets of dialog using famous lines such as Dirty Harry's "Do I feel lucky" quote. Following these short clips will be a series of increasingly shorter cuts that accelerate the pace and bombard the viewer with images of the iconic hypermasculine ideal. Included will be Mel Gibson in *The Patriot*, Russell Crowe in *Gladiator*, Brad Pitt and Edward Norton in *Fight Club*, Woody Harrelson in *Natural Born Killers*, John Travolta in *Swordfish*, as well as clips from *Reservoir Dogs* and *True Romance* in which violence and cruelty are glamorized.

Immediately following the tough guy montage, a scene from *Broadcast News* will appear. In this clip, Albert Brooks is talking on the phone with Holly Hunter and he says, "Wouldn't this be a great world if insecurity and desperation made us more attractive? If needy were a turn-on?" This brief clip will serve as both comic relief and as a transition into Part Two of the film.

Part Two

In the beginning of Part Two, white text over a black screen will read, "Real Men Don't Eat Quiche." Here the film revisits those vox pop interviews established in Part One, as young people tell the camera what they've heard

about so-called Real Men. These statements will be both scripted and unscripted, in hopes of drawing on the life experiences of those interviewed.

Scripted "Real Men" statements will include:

- Real Men Don't Cry
- Real Men Don't Ask For Directions
- Real Men Don't Do Housework
- Real Men Don't Change Diapers

Following the vox pop montage, several interviews with Ball State faculty will explore the psychology of gender development, and how girls and boys are raised to see men's roles in society. These will be intercut with B-Roll taken from local college hangouts, including restaurants and bars, as well as private parties. The shots will be planned in greater detail after the interviews are conducted, to maximize the chances of capturing on video what behaviors the experts describe. Footage of babies, toddlers, and school-age children may also be added as needed to correlate to expert interviews.

Several Ball State faculty members are currently being considered for interviews. These are:

- James Chesebro, Distinguished Professor of Telecommunications
- Carmen Siering, Assistant Professor of English, Assistant Professor of Women's Studies
- Heather Adams, Assistant Professor of Psychological Science
- Melinda Messineo, Associate Professor of Sociology
- Adam Beach, Assistant Professor of English

The interviews will weave together an image that describes the problems inherent our society's gender role expectations. For boys, conforming to gender norms may mean being teased about playing with dolls. Some boys experience harassment and even violence if they don't fit the masculine ideal. A recent marketing campaign from Tonka proclaims, "Boys are built different." It seems that Tonka has recently pulled the ad, but if it is available, that commercial will appear here between interview segments.

The impact of gender development on girls will also be discussed in limited context. Only the impression made on girls about what to expect from boys will be explored fully. The female understanding of the masculine ideal informs a girl's decisions about whom to choose for dating and partnership. The underlying theory suggested in this film proposes that accepted norms of male behavior in Western society include aggression, violence, and even cruelty. Women's expectations of male behavior are informed by cultural cues, and they often find themselves attracted to men who demonstrate hypermasculine traits but who don't meet their needs in real life.

Clips from an relevant episode of Scrubs will be intercut with this segment that highlight the fear common among men of ending up in the "Friend Zone." As J.D. tries to woo Elliot, he is convinced he has only a short window of time to make a romantic move before ending up in the dating world's No-Man's Land. These excerpts will be used both to underscore the argument and to provide comic relief, with the added bonus of being highly accessible to the intended audience.

Part Three

White text on a black screen reads, "What Women Want." Vox pop interviews are revisited. This time the students are asked what women want and their responses are mostly unscripted. Both male and female students will offer their views. At least one of the male subjects will say, "Women want me!" This is another device aimed at keeping the film light-hearted and personal.

There will be a discussion with a group of college age women following the vox pop interviews. Women will describe the qualities they normally find themselves attracted to in men, and then describe what kind of man they want to end up with long term. The disparities in these two "ideal males" will be discussed amongst the women, and they will share their stories about disastrous dating relationships. These women will be recruited from Psychology of Women and similar classes, where they would already have explored the topic academically. This would be an opportunity for them to reflect on their own personal experiences, and to share those experiences with others.

This segment will be shot in someone's home. It will have a relaxed atmosphere, where the women will be encouraged to open up about their personal lives. Laughter and common experiences will feature highly in this section, and the tone will be reflective and introspective. B-Roll of young men and women interacting will be intercut with this discussion as needed to emphasize the behaviors described.

Conclusion

The running time of this documentary film is expected to be about ten to twelve minutes. That translates to about three and a half minutes for each of the

three parts. The purpose of the film is to initiate discussion, to provide insight into gender psychology, and to get students thinking about how gender roles in our society affect dating relationships later in life.

The mechanics involved with producing this film will not be unusually challenging. The subjects can all be found locally and the locations are readily available. A good crew would consist of three individuals: a director, a videographer, and a boom operator.

The major production challenges for this film are the copyright issues. Under the Fair Use Doctrine, excerpts from film and television are permitted for educational purposes. Provided this film does not circulate outside the academic community, and provided there is no monetary gain, these copyright concerns should not pose a considerable hurdle.

Do nice guys really finish last? The phrase has been repeated so often that we have integrated it into our popular culture and accepted it as fact. No one really knows for sure what a “nice guy” is. We all have our different definitions. This film intends to make use of the mental image that springs to mind when we think of this stereotype, and explore some basic cultural assumptions about men in a new way. Ideally, the film will encourage young women to reconsider their perceptions and offer alternatives to those who are willing to challenge societal notions of what it means to be a man.